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Regan Reportedly Sat In On Briefings by Meese

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 29 — Donald T. Regan, President Reagan's chief of staff, attended meetings this week in which Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d presented details about his inquiry into the Iran arms deals, according to Administration officials.

Mr. Regan has said he was unaware of the diversion of as much as \$30 million from the arms sales to the Nicaraguan rebels. Nonetheless several veteran law enforcement officials suggested that Mr. Regan voluntarily withdraw from any further meetings in which the progress of the investigation is discussed.

"Don Regan should not be in on any briefings," said one law enforcement official not presently involved in the Iran case. The official added that if there was found to be any criminal liability, Mr. Regan would be one of the natural suspects.

Mr. Meese said this week that two White House officials, Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, and Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the national security adviser, knew about the operation.

Dennis Thomas, a senior aide to Mr. Regan, declined to comment on whether Mr. Regan would excuse himself from future discussions of the Justice Department investigation or its findings.

Regular Briefings Not Planned

Patrick Korten, a spokesman for the Justice Department, said today that the department had received no request from the White House for regular briefings on the inquiry, and "we're not planning on providing any." He said the White House would be informed about developments in the case as various "milestones" were reached.

The briefings by Mr. Meese of President Reagan and Mr. Regan all took place before the Justice Department launched its criminal investigation. Administration officials said that Mr. Meese discussed what had been uncovered through several days of reviewing documents and interviewing the key White House aides who were involved in the operation or knew about it.

At his news conference on Tuesday, Mr. Meese said Mr. Regan knew nothing about the diversion of millions to the Nicaraguan contras. He did not explain the evidence for this assertion. Both The Los Angeles Times and United Press International have quoted unnamed officials as saying Mr. Regan had been told about the program, charges that Mr. Regan has denied.

Meanwhile, an Administration official said the Federal Bureau of Investigation had begun its interviews today in the criminal investigation of the Iran arms dealings. The official would not say who was being contacted by the bureau, but said the interviews were likely to continue through the weekend.

Meanwhile, Senator Dave Durenberger, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said in an interview to be broadcast today that he believed "a lot of people" knew about the operation. He said that six to eight present and former Central Intelligence Agency officials would be called as witnesses to testify under oath before the committee beginning Monday.

'I Suspect He Had Help'

Mr. Meese said that only Admiral Poindexter, Colonel North, and the former national security adviser, Robert C. McFarlane, had at least partial awareness that money was being diverted to the contras.

"My present opinion is the design was Ollie North," said Mr. Durenberger on "John McLaughlin's One on One," a public affairs television program. "I suspect he had help from a couple of other people at about his level."

"The framework for that design was built around the President," he continued. "It's been built for several years. The President is maybe — I hate to use the word a frenzy, but something approaching a frenzy with regard to our inability as a country to come to grips with what's going on in Nicaragua; the failure of the Congress to appreciate, as the President believes he appreciates, that we had to do something in Nicaragua."

A White House spokesman said today that Admiral Poindexter would continue to have access to his office at the White House, although his personal files have been secured. The spokesman, Donald Mathes, said Admiral Poindexter was expected to visit his White House office Sunday to deal with some of his remaining administrative duties.

Mr. Mathes said Admiral Poindexter had last been in his office on Wednesday. By that time, he said, investigators had taken possession of his files.

Colonel North Barred

Colonel North has been barred from the White House although he tried to enter the complex Thursday. He decided not to wait for clearance when reporters approached him.

Members of Congress continued to criticize Justice Department for not having locked up documents until several days after the first interviews in the case by Mr. Meese. The Justice Department is investigating reports that Colonel North and Admiral Poindexter destroyed documents last weekend, perhaps as part of routine procedure.

"I think at the first indication of potential violations of the law, the first thing you try to do is preserve the evidence," said Representative William Hughes, a New Jersey Democrat and a member of the House Judiciary Committee. "It's elementary."

"I had some major problems with the length of time it took Mr. Meese to bring in the F.B.I.," he said. "This was most unusual." Mr. Hughes urged Mr. Meese to appoint a special prosecutor to handle the case, a call echoed by many lawmakers this week.